

A COMMAND AND A PROMISE

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“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”
James 4:8

[Another sermon by Mr. Spurgeon upon the same text is #2795, The Double Drawing Nigh, with which is included an exposition of the chapter from which the text is taken.]

NOTICE the sentences immediately preceding our text, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” Wherever we are, we must come into contact with the unseen powers either for good or evil. Go where we may, we cannot shut ourselves away from them. If we could take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, spiritual beings would still be all around us there.

Doubtless there are many invisible spirits, good or evil, in our midst at this moment, and when we go forth to our homes, or tomorrow go to our business or other duties, they will still attend us, the evil spirits seeking to lead our souls astray, and the holy angels carrying out their sacred commission, “to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”

These spiritual beings are divided into two bands. One band is under the leadership of that great fallen spirit—great, though fallen—who, by his masterly genius, has secured control over multitudes of other spirits, who do his bidding and yield to his will with unquestioning obedience. You also may surrender yourself to him if you will, he is the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, and you may, if you will, be his slave, you may be girded with his chains, you may serve in his servitude, and you may earn the wages which he will pay you at the last, for “the wages of sin is death.”

But surely, the admonition of the practical apostle James is a wise one, and we shall do well to take heed to it, and revolt from our old master. Let us break his bonds asunder and cast away his cords from us, in the name of Jesus, let us resist the devil and he will flee from us.

Jesus has a far greater host of spirits under his leadership than Satan has, and at His command, they shall keep us in all our ways, and bear us up in their hands, lest we dash our feet against a stone. His legions are far mightier than those of the black prince of darkness, and their services shall all be at our disposal, whenever we need them, as soon as we have renounced all allegiance to our former tyrant lord.

Now, having noted the connection of our text, I am going to apply it to three classes of persons, first, *to the believer*, secondly, *to the backslider*, and then last of all, *to the unconverted*.

I. First, then, we have here A MESSAGE TO THE BELIEVER, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”

In Scripture, drawing nigh has various meanings. First, it means, *draw nigh to God in worship, in prayer, and in praise*. When the hen sees a hawk in the air hovering over her brood, she gives a peculiar warning cluck, calling her little ones to come to her, while at the same moment she herself draws nigh to them.

In a far higher fashion, the voice of God calls you to Him, warning you of the danger that lurks all round you, and while you run to hide from peril beneath the shadow of His wings, He on His part runs to meet you as the forgiving father ran to meet his prodigal son. You draw nigh to Him in the fearfulness

and feebleness of your supplication, and He draws nigh to you in the faithfulness and almightiness of His everlasting love.

I am afraid that we often pray as if our God were at a distance from us, this can never be prevailing prayer. I do not despise that prayer which is like shooting an arrow up to the throne of God, but I love better still the prayer that grips the angel of the covenant, the prayer that stands foot to foot with Him, and wrestles with Him until the breaking of the day, and even then cries, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." If you can draw nigh to your Lord in prayer like that, He will certainly draw nigh to you, and you will be like a prince who has power to prevail with God and with men.

Let me encourage you, dear friends, who have been backward in your private prayers, or who have cried to Him as though He were a long way off. "Draw nigh to him." There are no bounds set around this mount of grace as there were around mount Sinai. You may climb up to the place called Calvary, and clasp to your bosom the Christ who there died upon the accursed tree, for He is your Brother, your Friend, your Savior, your all in all, if you are truly trusting Him.

So to you I say, as Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." Come near to Him and you shall soon have an answer to your prayers.

It is the same with praise, and I am afraid that often we do not really draw nigh to God when we are professing to praise Him. I know that, sometimes, when we are singing God's praises in our great assemblies here, we are drawn very near to the gates of heaven. At such times I have felt as though I were swimming in an ocean of sacred delight. It should be so with every act of worship, it should all draw us nearer to our God. There are times when we feel more closely drawn to Him in the closet of private prayer than in the public services of the sanctuary, but still, there is a special blessing attending united prayer and praise which is not to be realized elsewhere.

I remember reading of a Jew who would not open a business in a certain town because there was no synagogue in it, and I wish that Christians would always be as careful to settle down, if possible, in a place where they would not lack religious privileges, for prayer and praise, like the two wheels of the chariot which carried Jacob down to Joseph, bring us near to our beloved Lord and Master, and He, at the same time, comes to meet us, and draws nigh to us.

But I find that in Scripture, the term, "Draw nigh to God," is often used in the sense of *asking counsel of God*. Thus the Israelites, when they were in perplexity or difficulty, consulted the priest, and he, wearing the ephod and the breastplate with the mysterious Urim and Thummim, was able to interpret the will of God as it had been revealed to him, and now, though no sacred ephod or breastplate is worn by mortal man, though the ancient oracles are dumb, and though no earthly prophet speaks infallibly according to the will of God, you may still draw near to God Himself, in the name of Jesus Christ His Son, and seek the guidance of His ever-blessed Spirit. I hope you will do so at every step of your life, for what step is there that is not important?

Those that seem to us to be of the least significance may be the very ones that will the soonest lead us into mischief. But there are certain periods in our history when it is absolutely necessary that we should say to ourselves, "Let us consult the Lord about this matter." Many of you would never have been in the trouble in which you now are if you had but waited upon God before you took a certain course which has brought you nothing but sorrow. We heedlessly run before the fiery cloudy pillar moves, and when we find that we have rushed into the waste howling wilderness, we lay the blame for our own folly at the door of God's providence.

Let it not be so with any of you, dear friends, let every morning's plans be spread out before the Lord to see whether they meet with His approval, and let every evening's joys and sorrows be brought to Him that He may show you how to glorify Him in all that happens to you. Solomon truly said, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool," and David just as truly said, "But he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about." You need never lack divine guidance, for you can have it by asking for

it. God is willing to guide you if you will only seek His guidance. See to it, then, that you practice the text in the sense of asking counsel of God, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”

There is a third meaning to the phrase, “Draw nigh to God,” it is used in the sense of *enjoying communion with God*. There are some here who do not understand what I mean by communion with God, they are completely puzzled by the very simple language of the apostle John, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

There are hundreds and thousands of people, constantly attending church or chapel, who do not know the meaning of the word “communion.” If you were to ask them what they understand by it, they would probably say that it means eating a piece of bread and drinking a little wine at the Lord’s supper. And more than that, if they were to ask me to explain to them what true spiritual communion with God means, I should probably fail to make them comprehend it, yet you who, by grace, have been enabled to drink of these cooling streams, know well what that communion means.

Some of you, who have been the most deeply taught of the Spirit, could sing through the whole Song of Solomon and see your Beloved in it all, while to others it is only an Eastern love song which is to them quite incomprehensible. You know Christ, not only by faith, but by a sort of second sense which makes Him very real to you. You have drawn near to Christ and talked with Him, and He has drawn near to you and talked with you, and He has been nearer to you and dearer to you than any earthly friend has ever been.

Oh, what joy believers know when they realize Christ’s presence, when His left hand is under their head, and His right hand does embrace them! Talk of heaven—such communion is heaven begun below. When heaven’s gates are opened wide, and the celestial sunshine comes streaming through, it falls upon the eyes that have been illuminated by the Holy Ghost, that is true spiritual communion, and the glorified spirits above do but know that bliss to the full in knowing God, and rejoicing in the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps, my dear brother, you have been reading Rutherford’s letters, and you have said to yourself, “Alas! I cannot hope to enjoy such communion with Christ as Rutherford enjoyed.” But why should you not? Read our text again, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” You, my dear sister, may have read the life of Madame Guyon, and you have said, “What an angel in human form that woman must have been!” But if you draw nigh to God, you may have as much love to Christ as she had, and you may enjoy as much fellowship with Christ as she had, for “He will draw nigh to you.”

You have envied Mary because she sat at Jesu’s feet, or you have wished that you had been John, to lean your head upon your Master’s bosom, well, you may do both these things in a spiritual sense, and that is better than the carnal. “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” To *you*, even to you, the very feeblest of those who resist the devil, will God draw nigh if you draw nigh to Him.

I think, however, that there is another meaning in our text, and that is, “draw nigh to God” *in the general strain and tenor of your life*. We all know that the sun, the great center of the solar system, has several planets revolving around him, some of them comparatively near, others at a greater distance, and some still more remote, and Jesus Christ, the great Sun of righteousness, has His people revolving around Him as the planets circle round the sun. Some of them are very near the great central Luminary, others are far away, at a vast distance from Him, and others are neither very near nor very far off, but somewhere between the two.

There are some believers who are like the planet Mercury. You do not often see that fast revolving planet because it keeps so near the sun that it is usually lost in his bright rays. So is it with some Christians, the world knows little of them, they make no noise as they move along in their appointed orbit, and they keep so near to Christ that they seem to be absorbed into His radiance. Their thoughts are so much occupied with Christ, their heart’s affection is so fully given to Him, that they do not talk much about earthly things, their great desire is to live in close and hallowed fellowship with their Lord.

There are others who are like the planets that are far away from the sun, yet some rays of light and heat reach even them, and those believers who are living at a distance from Christ have some of the

divine light and heat within them, but oh, so little compared with what they might have! Oh, that you, who are so far off from God, would leave your distant orbits and draw nigh to Him, for then He would also draw nigh to you!

You know, dear friends, that there is almost as much difference between some Christians and others as there is between Christians and worldlings—I said almost, for there is not quite the same difference, though there is nearly the same. There are heights of lofty consecration and of intimate communion with Christ, to which some believers have attained, but of which others have not yet even dreamed. There is an inner circle of fellowship into which only a few privileged saints have ever entered, these are the elect out of the elect, who have been distinguished above all the rest of Christ's disciples by the loftier grace which has been their peculiar characteristic.

Oh, that we had many more such Christians in all our churches! There are a few of them scattered about Christendom, like grains of salt, but we need many more of them—men who, like Moses, have their faces made to shine with a supernatural brightness because they have dwelt with God upon the mount of secret communion—men who are not afraid to die because they have looked without alarm into the face of God, through Jesus Christ their Lord—and men who have learned how to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ, and there is no higher life than that.

Brethren and sisters in Christ, “draw nigh to God,” press towards the highest degree of godliness that is possible for you to obtain, seek to have the closest communion with Christ that mortals can ever know while here on earth. Do not be content to be in the outer courts, the lobbies, the ante-chambers of religion, strive to gain admission to the very holy of holies itself, for that is where your Lord would have you to be.

You know that there is a sort of border-land where many professors live, where a man is thought to be a Christian, but all the while he is not half a Christian. He is counted among the saved, yet he lives on the very borders of damnation, and if at the last he is saved, we shall sorrowfully have to add, “yet so as by fire.” In some respects he is a righteous man, as Lot was, yet like Lot, he dwells in Sodom. He is in some ways a good man, as Noah was, yet like him, he falls into shameful sin.

Oh, that we could all rise above this wretched condition, and live continually so close to Christ that men would take knowledge of us that we had been with Jesus, and had caught something of His spirit, and had been so changed by grace that we were far more like Him than we now are!

There I leave my text with the believer. I would fain draw you nigh to God, beloved, by my words, if I could, but I know that He must Himself draw you by His grace if the drawing is to be effectual. So let this be your prayer and resolve this very moment, “Draw us, and we will run after thee.”

II. Now, in the second place, we have in our text AN ENTREATY TO THE BACKSLIDER, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”

I must speak but briefly on this point, but I need to be as earnest as I am brief.

So, backslider, you have come in here tonight, a friend, who is up from the country, persuaded you to accompany him, or you would probably not have been here, for you have almost given up going to a place of worship, and you think there is no hope for you. *Friend, do you know what your doom will be if you continue as you now are?* Have you ever read the story of Judas? Do you know what became of Demas, and Simon Magus, and Alexander the coppersmith, and others who turned aside from the faith in the days of the apostles? Remember those terrible yet inspired words, “If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

It would have been better for you never to have had any knowledge of the truth, than to have known it, and then sinned willfully against it, and so, after all, to be a castaway. If you are a true child of God, though a wanderer from His ways, you will be brought back to Him, and I pray that you may be brought back to Him this very hour, but if you are an apostate, a backslider in heart, you will be filled with your own ways. Having filled up the measure of your iniquity, you will be driven from God's presence into the place of woe where hope and mercy never can come.

Yet listen to me, backslider, *this terrible sentence has not yet been pronounced on you.* The voice of God still cries to you, “Draw nigh unto me.” Whither art thou flying, my brother? Are you seeking to escape from God’s righteous judgments? That is impossible, for His thunderbolts will soon overtake you, and seal your eternal doom. Run not away from Him, but draw nigh to Him, cast down your weapons of rebellion, and fall prostrate before Him, seeking the forgiveness which He is willing and waiting to bestow upon you.

Let me take you by the hand, and try to encourage you to come near to the Lord this very moment. Do you ask, “How can I come near to Him?” Come just as you came to Him at the first. Perhaps you reply, “But I never really came to Him aright.” Then come to Him aright just now. I came to Him as a sinner, and He gave me a hearty welcome, and He will receive you just as graciously if you only come to Him with wholehearted repentance for your sin, and true faith in Jesus Christ as your only Savior.

But here is one who did run well, yet she has been hindered. Backsliding woman, remember that your God is married to you, and that He bids you return to Him. Backsliding man, you have turned aside from your God, yet He loves you still, and cries out to you, “Return, return, return.” The Lord still says, as He did in Jeremiah’s day, “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.” Oh, that you would reply even as they did, “Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God”!

I am sure that you are not happy in your present condition, on the contrary, you are as sad and miserable as you can possibly be. This very house of prayer reminds you of your former privileges and joys, of the days when you delighted in God, and felt that you were indeed on your way to heaven. You cannot be content to live in the far country among the swine that are not fit companions for you, leave the husks to the pigs, they can never satisfy your hunger.

Come back to your Father, poor prodigal! Though your clothes are in rags, though you are steeped in filth, though you have sinned most grievously, come back to your Father, and He will receive you with open arms and open heart. I will not act towards you as the elder brother did to the prodigal, but I will welcome you as a brother if you are indeed a brother, and if you are not a brother, you are a sinner, and “this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” even the very chief.

So, “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Put your soul’s affairs into His hands, ask Him to be your Advocate, to plead your cause before the King, He never yet lost a case that was entrusted to Him, and He will not lose yours.

III. I have almost anticipated the last division of my discourse, but I must close by giving from my text AN INVITATION TO THE UNCONVERTED, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.”

The great Gospel rings out again, and the same note sounds to the sinner as to the saint, not that there is any implication in this text that the sinner can draw nigh to God by his own unaided power, or that he comes first, and God comes next, or that there is any natural willingness in the sinner to come to God.

The text seems to me *to show the difference between the law and the Gospel.* God said even to Moses, the chosen leader of His ancient people, “Draw not nigh hither: take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” But under the Gospel God says to the sinner, “Draw nigh hither, ’tis true that this is holy ground, but it is sprinkled with blood, the blood of My only begotten and wellbeloved Son, and if the blood is also sprinkled upon you, you may draw nigh and you cannot come too nigh, so come and welcome, sinner, come.”

If it were a question of merit, or of justification by the works of the law, the sinner might well try to fly from the avenging hands of divine justice, but on the ground of divine love, and pity, and mercy, and free and sovereign grace, the sinner may draw nigh to God though he has nothing to recommend him, he may come just as he is, and God in mercy will draw nigh to him.

Should there be here a swearer, a drunkard, or one who has committed the foulest of sins, the text says to him in the sense in which I have explained it, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” Sinner, if you repent of your sin, and trust in Jesus as your Savior, God will not spurn you, and drive you from Him, but He will draw nigh to you as you do draw nigh to Him.

Then next, the text *shows the sinner what God means to do for him*. He means to draw the sinner nigh to Himself, and then Himself to draw nigh to the sinner. This is done in two ways, it is done, first, by what Jesus did for us when He rent the veil that separated us from God, and it is done, next, by what the Holy Spirit does in us when He rends the veil that hides God from us. There are, or were, these two veils—the veil that concealed the visible manifestation of God from men, which was rent asunder at the moment of Christ’s death—and the veil that is over our own hearts, which conceals God from us until the Holy Spirit takes it away, and we see God in Christ Jesus reconciled to us by the death of His Son.

I fear that there are even some in this congregation who are living just as if there were no God at all. If there really were no God, you would probably not be any different from what you are now. God is not in all our thoughts, or if you ever do think of Him, you say, with the fool of whom the psalmist tells us, “No God—no God for me, I want no God, and so far as I am concerned, there is no God.”

Well then, if you are ever to be saved, you will have to be brought nigh to God by a power altogether outside yourself, you will have to be made to feel that God is One whom you must love, you will be reconciled to Him by the death of His Son, and your heart will be filled with love to Christ through the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit.

The text further *shows what God will lead the sinner to do for himself*. Ungodly man, if you are ever to be saved, you must draw nigh to God in prayer. Go to Him at this moment, just where you are sitting, and confess all your sin to Him, there is no need for you to utter a word that any of us can hear, for God can read the language of your heart.

Then you must draw nigh to Christ by faith. Just as that poor woman in the crowd touched the hem of His garment and was immediately made whole, so must you, by faith, get into contact with Christ. Trust in Him as your one and only Savior, and He will certainly save you, and this shall be the grand result of it all, you will draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.

Oh, that you would now cry to Him, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” That will be drawing nigh to God in penitence and contrition and supplication, and He will draw nigh to you in gracious acceptance and blessing, and then, one day, He will call you to draw nigh to Him in heaven itself, to sit at His table in glory, to feast with Him in His kingdom. Then shall you, even you, wear a crown, and wave a palm, and forever adore that matchless grace which first drew you nigh to Him, and then draw nigh to you.

If there is one here who will go home to pray, “Draw me nigh, O God!” or better still, if there is one anywhere in this vast throng, whose heart is praying, “Lord, save me, draw me with the cords of a man, (even the man Christ Jesus, the Friend of sinful man), with the bands of love, O God, draw nigh to me, for I would fain draw nigh to You,”—if there is one here whose eye has in it the tear of penitence, I point that one to Jesus hanging on the cross, and say—

*“There is life for a look at the Crucified One;
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner—look unto Him, and be saved,—
Unto Him who was nail’d to the tree.”*

Remember that the Son of God, the Lord of life and glory, suffered indescribable shame and ignominy, and at last death itself, for sinners, for every sinner who trusts in His great atoning sacrifice. If you are trusting in Him, that is proof positive that He died for you, died in your room and place and stead, died that you should never die, for He bore all the punishment that your sin deserved, so there is none left for you to bear. He drank to the last dregs the cup of wrath that was your due, so there is not one drop left for you to drink. He suffered all that could ever have been your portion even in hell itself, for, being infinite, there was no limit to His agonies, and now, for you, there is no hell, no torment, no condemnation. You may know assuredly whether Christ did die for you or not, do you trust Him? Will you trust Him now? Will you say—

“Just as I am—and waiting not

*To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come”?*

If You have said that from your heart, you are now a saved soul, and you may go to your home rejoicing in the Lord, for your sins, which were many, are all forgiven, and you are on your way to heaven. God grant that it may be so, for Jesus Christ’s sake!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JAMES 1

Verse 1. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greetings.*

The apostle James evidently believed in no lost ten tribes, as some nowadays do. They were never lost, the Israelites whom we see nearly every day belong to some of all the twelve tribes, so James addressed his epistle, “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greetings.”

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

Or trials; [See sermon #1074, All Joy in All Trials].

3-5. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom,—*

That is just what most of us lack, “If any of you lack wisdom,”—

5. *Let him ask of God,—*

That is the short road to true knowledge—to pray. Study is good, no doubt, for the acquisition of knowledge, but praying is the best way to obtain true wisdom.

5-6. *That giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing unwavering.*

For the very essence of prayer lies in believing that God can and will give us the things which we seek at His hands.

6. *For he that wavereth—*

The man who does not know whether prayer will succeed or not—

6. *Is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.* [See sermon #2537, A Warning to Waverers].

You can never tell what will become of the wave, it goes just where it is driven, and there are many men who can be good, after a certain fashion, if they are in good company, but they can be just as bad if the wind blows from another quarter. But if we have true faith in God, and true faith in prayer, we shall not be “like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”

7. *For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*

What the wild waves are saying, we know not, so is it with a man who is “like a wave of the sea.” He utters words without meaning, and his prayer dies away like the roar of the billows upon the shore when the fury of the storm has abated. “Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.”

8. *A double minded man—*

A man with two minds, a mind to the religious, and another mind to enjoy the pleasures of the world—such a man—

8. *Is unstable in all his ways.*

There is nothing solid or substantial about him, nothing enduring, you cannot reckon on him, for he is blown hither and thither, as chaff flies before the wind.

9. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:*

For the Gospel lifts him up out of his poverty, and makes him a child of God, who is spiritually rich even though he is poor in temporal things.

10. *But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.*

Let him not therefore reckon upon his wealth as though it were anything but a trust and a burden laid upon him, for he will have to leave it, and he himself, “as the flower of the grass, shall pass away” Let him rejoice to get down to the Rock of Ages, let him lay hold of eternal things as if he had nothing else in which he could trust.

11-12. *For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation:* [See sermon #1874, A Discourse upon True Blessedness Here and Hereafter].

Or trial, the man that holds on and holds out under it, and does not give way under it, blessed is the man that is tried:—

12-13. *For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God:*

Here we must take the word “tempted” in its dark meaning, for the Scriptural word “temptation” means two very different things. When we are drawn towards evil, that is the black meaning of the word temptation, but when we are tested or tried in order that it may be seen that the good in us is real, that is the bright meaning of the word temptation. In that sense, God did tempt (try or test) Abraham, but not in the other sense.

13-15. *For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

There is the parentage and the progeny of sin. Sin comes of unbridled desire. A man feels that he must have a certain thing, right or wrong, he is determined to have it. Then there comes of that determination the overt act of sin, and what comes of that? Why, death, for every sin in its measure helps to kill us, to destroy that which is the real life of our manhood. Every sin is a drop of poison. There are sweets that are poisonous, and the pleasures of sin are of this kind, and let the poison of sin alone, let it work in its natural way, and it will bring forth death. That man, therefore, who lives in sin, and loves it, has nothing before him but everlasting death, he may well tremble.

16-17. *Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,—*

It never comes from within our own hearts, it does not even come by imitation of better men, it must come from God.

17. *And cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

As every sunbeam comes from the sun, so all grace and virtue must come from God, with whom there is neither parallax nor tropic, as there is with the natural sun. He never declines, He never varies, but He is ever the same.

Now, in proof that every good thing in us comes from God, James says that our very spiritual life comes from God—

18. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

True believers have been twice created, and the second time we were begotten again by the Word of God that became the living seed within our spirits, out of which the new life grew, and now we are “a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” Just as the first ears of ripe corn were brought into the sanctuary, and dedicated to God, so are all true believers consecrated persons, the “firstfruits of his creatures.”

19-20. *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

We never do much for the truth or goodness by getting angry about it. Whenever a man debates about the truth, and loses his temper, he has also lost his cause. I have heard of one, who knew little of true religion, who watched a missionary and a Brahmin disputing, and he decided that the missionary was in the right, when he was asked why he thought so, he said, “Because he kept his cool, and the other man flew into a passion.” Although that may not always be a good test of the truth of the matter in question, it certainly is a good test of how the dispute is going.

21. *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.* [See sermon #1847, Before Sermon, At Sermon and After Sermon].

That evil branch is cut away, now be ready to have a branch of a better kind inserted into you, even “the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls,” that you may bring forth better fruit than the old crabbed stock of nature can possibly yield.

22-26. *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.* [See sermons #1467, Two Kinds of Hearers, and #1848, The Looking Glass]. *If any man among you seems to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, and deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.*

That which is in the well will come up in the bucket, and that which is in the heart will come up on the tongue. An unbridled tongue denotes an unrenewed heart. Oh, that God would ever give us grace in our heart to move our tongue aright! Then, as the rudder guides the whole ship, our tongue will guide our whole body, and the whole of our manhood will be under holy government and control.

27. *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* [See sermon #2313, Charity and Purity].

Oh, how much this means—tenderness to others, and tenderness of conscience in ourselves! How much grace we need in order that these two virtues may shine brightly within us!

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